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The Chicago Great Western Today

The current rehabilitation of the Chicago Great Western may be said to have started soon after World War II; it has continued with renewed vigor ever since. In 1946 Harold W. Burtness succeeded Pat Joyce as president. Mr. Burtness started railroading at the age of seventeen as a clerk on the Burlington and shortly thereafter switched to the Pennsylvania, where he became secretary to the traffic manager. In 1922 he went with the Great Western as secretary to President Sam Felton and twenty-four years afterward found himself in his former boss's chair.

During Burtness' administration the Corn Belt Route bought its first Diesels: three 1,000-h.p. switchers, which were put to work marshaling cars at Oelwein in 1947. Later that year six 4,500-h.p. Diesels began replacing the faithful Texas steamers in road service. During the next two years there was a wide variety of Diesels, running the gamut from 660-h.p. switchers to ponderous four-unit 6,000-h.p. road freighters.

On October 19, 1948, Grant Stauffer, representing a group of investors who had purchased control of the road, succeeded Burtness as president. Stauffer headed the Sinclair Coal Company

and was also a director and chairman of the executive committee of the Kansas City Southern. His untimely death on March 31, 1949, resulted in the assistant to the president, William N. Deramus III, being elected to his place.

When Mr. Deramus took office at the age of thirty-three, he is said to have been the youngest Class I railroad president in America. He is a railroader by heritage and choice. His father is chairman of the board of the Kansas City Southern; an uncle, Louis S. Deramus, was trustee and chief executive officer on the Monon. Educated at the University of Michigan and at Harvard Law School, Deramus entered railroading after receiving his LL.B. His first job was as transportation apprentice on the Wabash. He left that road as assistant trainmaster of the St. Louis Division in 1943 to enter Military Railway Service. Mustered out in 1946 as a major, Deramus became assistant to the general manager of the Kansas City Southern. In November, 1948, he was appointed assistant to the president of the Great Western.

Under Deramus' presidency complete Dieselization was brought about in 1950. Within the past three years the main lines have been extensively reballasted and many miles of heavier rail laid. Radio communication has been installed, making it possible for train crews to contact dispatchers and yardmasters while their trains are

in motion. It also permits men in the cab to talk with crewmen in the caboose. Modern brick stations have recently been erected at Des Moines, Marshalltown, and Fort Dodge. In addition to shop improvements and more office buildings at Oelwein, a new icing plant and dock have been constructed in that community.

Time freights have been accelerated to meet or to better competitive schedules of other roads in Great Western territory. Trailer-on-flat-car service is now available at Des Moines. The pioneer Chicago-St. Paul and later Chicago-Council Bluffs service of truck trailer haulage on rails has been extended to include Chicago-Kansas City, St. Paul-Kansas City, and St. Paul-Council Bluffs operation.

On the other hand, the unprofitable dining and sleeping car service has been discontinued, and all branch line passenger service has been withdrawn. Local air-conditioned coach operation, however, continues on all the main lines.

The Chicago Great Western still serves virtually the same communities over the identical routes it did in the days of A. B. Stickney. In a few instances, noticeably on the Winona Branch from Planks to Winona, Minnesota, 41 miles, the CGW scrapped its own line and now operates over the North Western. A series of spindling trestles, along with a 3.3 per cent grade, plus a winding horseshoe curve, made that line uneco-

nomical to operate. More recently the five-mile Sycamore-De Kalb Branch in Illinois was pulled up, and CGW trains now use the parallel route of the North Western.

In several minor cases branches have been scrapped and service discontinued. As this is being written the road has received authorization to abandon the five-mile Bellechester Junction-Bellechester, Minnesota, spur. An earlier casualty in the same state was the Eden-Mantorville stub, six miles long, which had a daily milk train to St. Paul. For years the local was dubbed "The Milk Shake."

In 1951 the six-mile segment of the Waverly-Sumner Branch between Waverly and Bremer, Iowa, ceased operation. The other abandonments in Iowa occurred many years ago as a result of mining operations being worked out or rendered unprofitable. In this category was the long-forgotten three-mile stub from Valeria to the Oswald coal mines and the so-called Coalville Branch, which left the Fort Dodge-Lehigh Branch at Gypsum for mines three miles away. The thirties saw the Lehigh Branch cut back to Gypsum and the tracks ripped up east of that point.

With the removal of most of the general offices from Chicago to Oelwein in 1952, Iowa's role in the Great Western will be increasingly important. Having over half of its system in the state, it is a logical corollary for the Chicago Great Western

to have its management also within the state. Oelwein, Iowa, more or less the geographical center of the railway, is now the managerial hub as well.

Railroads have been called the "key to the prairies" because of their contribution to the settlement and growth of the Midwest. The history of railroading in Iowa is largely the story of the "Big Four" and the "Little Three." The "Big Four" is comprised of the Rock Island, the Burlington, the Chicago & North Western, and the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific — with almost seven thousand miles of track in Iowa. The "Little Three" includes the Minneapolis & St. Louis, the Illinois Central, and the CGW, with a combined trackage of over 2,200 miles in Iowa. Even in a jet-powered era, the Iowan still looks to the steel rails for much of his transportation needs. In 1953 there is every indication that the Chicago Great Western and her sister railways will keep pace with scientific achievements. The changes had been from wood, to coal, to electricity and fuel oil. The only question seemed to be: When will atomic-powered locomotives haul their cargoes over Iowa's prairies?

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.